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(U) CHINA: OPEN MINDS/OPEN DOORS

Summary

China's recent national writers' congress, which signaled a shift toward greater freedom from party interference in the arts and announced an expansion of the open-door economic policy, also had much larger political significance. The calls for further relaxation of both cultural and economic restrictions amounted to a repudiation of the campaign against "spiritual pollution"—a 1983 effort to circumscribe reform policies.

This development is an important success for General Secretary Hu Yaobang and other staunch reformers and should sound the political death knell for some of their opponents. The fact that most of the speeches at the session have not been published in the Chinese press suggests, however, that this latest skirmish may not be completely over.

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Political Theater

On the cultural side, the central theme of the proceedings was the need to restrain party involvement in the arts and to allow intellectuals much greater leeway in setting standards for themselves. In effect, this reverses the judgment of the "spiritual pollution" campaign, which accused intellectuals of not toeing the party line. Deng Xiaoping seemingly has given his blessing to this reversal. A recent compendium of 22 Deng speeches delivered over the past two and one-half years strikingly omitted his October 1983 speech endorsing attacks on spiritual pollution. Just recently, Deng claimed that his only "accomplishment" in 1983 was the anti-crime campaign.

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This development represents a major gain for General Secretary Hu, whose "liberal" views have been the chief complaint of the conservatives in recent years. That the battle was hard-won was suggested by repeated delays in the opening of the congress of the Writers' Association. Its parent organization--the Literary and Art Federation--reportedly will soon hold its congress as well and will crack open the cultural doors even farther.

Throughout the congress proceedings, a kind of shadow play took place, with many of the key actors offstage. Both villains--Politburo member Hu Qiaomu and Secretariat member Deng Liqun, chief perpetrators of the 1983 witchhunt against free-thinkers--were conveniently absent. Their messages to the session were greeted with hostile silence. The hero--literary czar and liberal advocate Zhou Yang--sent greetings from the hospital that were received with an ovation. The reform-minded People's Daily published articles and comments by other victims in recent years, including Bai Hua and Liu Binyan, who lavished praise directly or indirectly on Hu Yaobang, their chief defender.

Hu watched smugly from the audience as China's most prominent writers were thus given a platform for applauding his leadership and repudiating that of his opponents. At the close of the congress itself, artists were rewarded with new regulations granting them greater expression of individual creativity in the arts, and a number of prominent liberal figures were promoted to influential professional posts. The final act--replacement of the discredited Deng Liqun as Propaganda Department Director--may not be far behind.

Hu Qili, Hu Yaobang's chief assistant, organized the congress and delivered an address to resounding applause. Although Hu was careful to remind the intellectuals of their "responsibilities" to society, particularly in terms of praising and supporting the economic reform program, and the need to guard against "decadent" influences from both capitalism and feudalism, his critical comments were directed primarily at repressive "leftist" practices by party overseers. In this regard, the congress was in concert with recent media attacks on dogmatic leftists who refuse to go beyond "whatever" Marx had to say more than a century ago. One prominent theorist recently told foreign journalists that this public discussion was "quite timid," suggesting that the public ferment in culture and theory is only the tip of the iceberg compared with what is still going on behind the scene.

The "Open Coastal Zones" Initiative

Speaking at the annual meeting of the All-China Writers' Association on January 2, State Councilor Gu Mu, the government's spokesman for foreign investment issues, announced the creation of

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four "open coastal economic zones." Neither the geographic limitation of each zone nor the incentive policies to be adopted have yet been announced. According to a generally reliable Hong Kong newspaper, however, the new coastal zones will include the Pearl River delta of Guangdong (probably encompassing Guangzhou, Foshan, Jiangmen, and surrounding counties, and possibly the Zhuhai and Shenzhen Special Economic Zones); the Yangzi River delta (probably from Nanjing to Shanghai); the Liaodong peninsula of Liaoning (including Dalian and surrounding areas); and the Jiaodong peninsula of Shandong (possibly encompassing the belt from Yantai to Qingdao).

This announcement of the newest phase of the open-door policy, following visits by Premier Zhao Ziyang during the last half of 1984 to Liaoning, the Pearl River area, and the lower Yangzi, may represent a major victory for the reformers in the effort to extend incentives for foreigners to invest in China. But the circumstances of the announcement may indicate that the policy remains controversial.

First, Gu Mu chose an unusual forum at which to reveal this new policy. The writers' congress has been used in several ways as a public forum to embarrass more conservative members of the leadership--particularly Hu Qiaomu and Deng Liqun--who, along with their patron Chen Yun, are widely believed to have opposed the open-door policy and its negative cultural side effects.

Gu's speech, moreover, along with many others from the congress, has yet to be released in China, possibly indicating that the contents remain controversial. This development brings to mind the furor in Beijing last spring when Deng returned from his trip to the Special Economic Zones to announce the opening of 14 cities to foreign investment. Chen Yun may have been angry that he had not been fully consulted on a policy with which he was known to disagree. Nevertheless, the 14 cities were opened, a policy most recently praised publicly by Deng as one of his own significant accomplishments in 1984.

It may well be that the reformers have announced their newest initiative without full leadership consensus and are now presenting skeptics with a fait accompli.

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